

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF RAMSEY
ANOKA COUNTY
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, February 11, 2025, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor Ryan Heineman
Councilmember Kirsten Buscher
Councilmember Michael Olson
Councilmember Eric Peters
Councilmember Chris Riley
Councilmember Dan Specht
Councilmember Shanna Stewart

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen
City Engineer/Public Works Director Bruce Westby
Fire Chief Matt Kohner
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher
Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Mark Riverblood
City Attorney Fritz Knaak

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Heineman called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:30 p.m.

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Discuss Engineering Staffing and Future Public Works Structure

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to engineering staffing and the future of the Public Works structure with the upcoming retirement of Civil Engineer IV Leonard Linton.

Councilmember Specht asked if there is a lot of work that is not getting done because of the dual City Engineer and Public Works Director role.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby shared that it is hard to split his time between Engineering and Public Works and it is hard for him to readily engage with Public Works Staff. He explained that one of the main reasons he wanted the dual role was to get Public Works and engineering to interact better. He said all of the work is getting done but he would like to have some more involvement with Public Works.

City Administrator Hagen added that this was implemented prior to the focus on road maintenance and reconstruction which has greatly added to the work of the engineering department.

Councilmember Specht thanked Civil Engineer IV Linton for all of the work he has done for the City and the community over the last 21 years.

Mayor Heineman asked if the Stormwater Specialist position they are looking to create exists in other cities or if this is something the City is coming up with.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby said the position does exist in several other cities.

Administrative Services Director Lasher added that when she did the compensation study she found that there were six or seven other comparable cities that have a Stormwater Specialist.

Councilmember Riley stated the addition of a Stormwater Specialist makes perfect sense as this is primarily the work Civil Engineer IV Linton is doing.

The consensus of the Council was in support of hiring a Stormwater Specialist.

2.02: Discussion Regarding Fire Department Staffing

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report concerning fire department staffing.

Councilmember Riley asked what the Fire Inspector would do once the firefighter who is currently on leave has returned.

Fire Chief Kohner explained that the role of the Fire Inspector is code compliance and code enforcement through inspections and plan reviews. He noted that this role will make a direct impact on responding to calls; however, the duties of the Fire Inspector are vastly different from the duties of a firefighter.

Administrative Services Director Lasher noted that fire call volume is up 27%.

Councilmember Stewart asked what it would look like if they waited on hiring for this new role.

Fire Chief Kohner explained that fire calls are consistent throughout the year and they do not see a busier time than others. He shared that there have been double digit increases in calls for service for the last nine years. He said if they were to wait on hiring for this new position it would be very taxing on the current full-time Staff.

Councilmember Buscher shared that she is fully supportive of the new position and thinks they should be brought on as soon as possible. She added that a lot of these calls are likely medical calls. She noted that they need to make sure that this increase in call volume is being addressed in the future.

Mayor Heineman noted that they want to lessen the financial impact of this as much as possible; however, with calls increasing and not wanting to push this issue further down the road, he is supportive of hiring for this new Fire Inspector role.

Councilmember Buscher added that they also need to think of the culture of the paid-on call firefighters.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with the new Fire Inspector role.

2.03: Councilmember Request for Agenda Items

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to Councilmembers requesting to add new agenda items.

Councilmember Specht asked if this is addressed in City policy.

City Administrator Hagen said there has never been a formal policy.

Administrative Services Director Lasher explained that it has been past practice that two Councilmembers must support an item in order for it to be added to an agenda.

Councilmember Specht said he likes the way it is now where either the Mayor can request an item to be added or two Councilmembers can make the request.

Councilmember Peters agreed.

Councilmember Riley shared that they are discussing this due to things that have happened in the fairly recent past. He explained that there have been items added in the past that were requested by Councilmembers that did not have all of the facts and information in the packet and only those Councilmembers who requested it be added have all of the information because they had done all of their research. He said he sees this as an abuse of the system. He stated he would not be supportive of items being added to the agenda last minute without the entire Council having time to review the information and he would like to see this avoided.

Councilmember Specht asked Councilmember Riley what he would suggest as the deadline to request new items added.

Councilmember Riley said he would want any new items to make it on to the agenda when it is published. He added that he would also want Staff to have enough time to get everything together that they need in order to publish the item as a part of the agenda.

City Administrator Hagen stated that in order for Staff to get decent information together for the packet, he would say they need about four days before the packet is published to get everything together. He noted that packets are posted the Thursday before Council meetings, meaning they would need to request a new item by the Monday of that week.

Councilmember Buscher agreed with Councilmember Riley that nothing outside of an emergency situation should be added to the agenda without giving both Staff and the Council time to review and prepare for the item. She said it is dangerous and unfair to spring a new item on both Councilmembers and Staff so soon before a meeting.

Mayor Heineman stated that putting an item on the agenda at the last minute is a tool that the Council has; however, it is not a wise option to use very often. He explained that in the past when he has requested that a new item be added to the agenda, he has taken it upon himself to do the research and get all of the information together for Staff. He noted that if someone requests something at the last minute and they do not put any effort into it, the case will be very weak and it will create chaos. He shared that he would not be in favor of limiting the Council to not request new items be added to the agenda.

Councilmember Olson stated that Staff's recommendation of four days prior to the packet being posted does not need to be a hard and fast rule, but rather a suggested guideline.

Mayor Heineman noted that when this has been abused in the past, other Councilmembers have exercised their ability to call out this behavior. He strongly discouraged limiting Council's ability to request new items be added as there have been things that have happened in the past where they want to address something sooner than two weeks until the next Council meeting.

Councilmember Stewart asked for examples of topics that have been added so last minute in the past. She stated that she would feel very disrespected as a Councilmember if an item was added so last minute without giving her and her fellow Councilmembers the chance to research and review the item.

Mayor Heineman shared that in the past he had requested that the Council add an item related to an executive order for mask mandates which he felt put unjust legal restrictions on residents. He said this was not something that he wanted to wait over two weeks to be discussed by the Council. He added that when he brought this item forward, he did the research and wrote out his own case for Staff.

Councilmember Stewart asked what safeguards they can use if there are Councilmembers or the Mayor who brings on a last minute item.

City Administrator Hagen said that the Council polices themselves when it comes to these kinds of things. He noted that if they do not have the information needed in order to make an informed decision then it is on the Council to determine. He added that it is very helpful for Staff if the Councilmembers who are requesting to add the item have done their own research in the event an item does need to be added last minute.

Mayor Heineman added that they would also want to give legal counsel time to weigh in on these items.

Councilmember Buscher asked what they would want the process to look like if an item is being requested but other Councilmembers do not feel like they have the time or the information in order to make an informed decision.

Councilmember Riley noted that they have the ability to not approve the agenda at the meeting. He said two Councilmembers could add an item to the agenda but that does not mean that it is approved.

Mayor Heineman added that they could also amend the agenda to remove the item in question.

Councilmember Peters asked if there is a deadline to pull items from the Consent Agenda.

City Administrator Hagen explained that pulling an item from the Consent Agenda is not as crucial when it comes to the timing; however, the day before the meeting would be the best date to have that request in by in the event that other Staff members need to attend the meeting.

Councilmember Peters agreed that this is a tool for the Council to use; however, he would like it to be used as seldom as possible.

Councilmember Specht said he would not want two Councilmembers to request an item be added and the rest of the Council vote to remove it.

Councilmember Riley noted that if an item is added at the last minute this is doing a disservice to the residents as they do not have time to review the agenda either. He added that when items are pulled from the Consent Agenda, all of the information is already in the packet for the Council to review.

Councilmember Buscher explained that if they remove something from an agenda that two Councilmembers are adding, they are not removing it to never be discussed, they are just removing it to allow for more time for all parties involved to review.

Mayor Heineman shared that if an item is added at the last minute without supporting documents then the residents would not have anything to review.

Councilmember Riley clarified that he is never trying to avoid talking about these items, but rather wanting to ensure the timing makes sense.

Councilmember Olson said it is unwise and bad policy to try to have the Council make decisions on something that they do not have all of the information on.

Mayor Heineman added that he is okay with giving the Mayor the same limitations as the fellow Councilmembers that he would need a supporting Councilmember in order to request an item be added to the agenda.

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the emergency procedures that are in State statute.

Councilmember Riley asked if they would entertain approving the meeting minutes under the Consent Agenda rather than its own agenda item.

Councilmember Stewart asked why it was moving to its own agenda item.

Mayor Heineman shared that the idea behind it was that having it as its own agenda item offered more transparency.

Councilmember Riley added that if there was ever anything that needed to be corrected or changed in the minutes then it can still be pulled from the Consent Agenda and be amended.

City Administrator Hagen noted that another reason for this change is that it allows a Councilmember to abstain from voting on the minutes if they were not in attendance at the meeting.

Mayor Heineman added that they can discuss adding the minutes back to the Consent Agenda at a future Work Session.

Councilmember Specht said he would also like to discuss the order of the agenda.

The consensus of the Council was to keep the requirement that two Councilmembers need to request an item to be added to an agenda and set a guideline that new items be requested eight days prior to the meeting, with certain more time sensitive items able to be added at the last minute with proper documentation.

2.04: Councilmember Meals

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report concerning Councilmember meals at meetings.

Councilmember Specht shared that although he voted to stop the Council meals last year, he would like to see them brought back as it can be difficult to get off work at 5:00 p.m. and to City Hall by 5:30 p.m. for the Work Session and have time for dinner in between.

Councilmember Buscher asked where the money for this would come from.

City Administrator Hagen said if the Council wants to bring back these meals they will find room in the budget for it.

Mayor Heineman asked if these meals were historically provided by Ramsey restaurants.

City Administrator Hagen said they try to order from Ramsey businesses; however, they focus on businesses that will deliver to eliminate Staff's need to pick up the food. He added that if they do bring this back, they would set a meal schedule so that Staff and the Council know what they will be ordering for every meeting.

Councilmember Buscher stated she cannot say yes to something that was not budgeted for.

Councilmember Stewart shared that since it had already been removed from the budget she does not think it should be brought back.

Councilmember Olson noted that he also voted against this last year as a money-saving tool. He suggested addressing this with the 2026 budget discussions to be brought back next year.

Mayor Heineman agreed. He said if they do look to bring these meals back he would want them to support Ramsey restaurants.

The consensus of the Council was to not bring back Councilmember meals at this time.

2.05: Minnesota State Flag on Ramsey Owned Public Property

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to flying the Minnesota State flag on Ramsey owned properties.

Councilmember Peters shared that he found that they do not need to fly the current Minnesota State flag on City property. He said it would be nice to have a Ramsey flag created by the residents to fly in the place of the State flag.

Councilmember Buscher stated that if they changed the flags she would like it to be the new State flag; however, she does not feel strongly one way or another.

Councilmember Specht added that when this was discussed originally, he was supportive of flying the old State flags rather than the new one as he had heard from residents that they did not think it was fair how the new flag was created. He said he is not against a City flag but it would be something cool to do.

Councilmember Riley suggested using the Happy Days symbol on a flag as the City's flag. He added that he would vote to not fly any State flag.

Mayor Heineman said he is okay keeping the old flag. He stated that if there is an opportunity for Staff to organize a contest for a City flag he would be supportive of this.

City Administrator Hagen noted that the Art Fair is coming up in July and they could tie in a City flag design contest with the Art Fair.

Councilmember Buscher said that she would not want to make the City flag design process at all similar to the design process for the State which residents did not agree with.

Councilmember Stewart shared that Minnesota has had issues with their State flag since 1893 with multiple changes throughout the years. She said if they roll out a City flag it could open a big can of worms and could bring a large debate of the new flag versus a traditional flag. She stated she loves the idea of having a design contest; however, not for a flag. She noted she would not want to see the City torn over a City flag. She shared that she is more supportive of the old State flag rather than the new one.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood suggested they have an art contest for a poster rather than a City flag to avoid any controversy. He explained that each year they have a theme for art in the park and they could integrate this into the plan.

The consensus of the Council was to keep the traditional State flag.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

3.01: Review Future Topics/ Calendar

Councilmember Buscher shared the idea of having a Coffee with a Councilmember event. She added that she would also like to discuss the idea of having a municipal dispensary or expanding the amount of allowable private dispensaries in the City. She noted they could invest in the old Town Hall site for a historical building. She added that she would also like to discuss the prevailing wages policy. She shared that she would also like the Police and Fire Chiefs to come to the Council on a quarterly basis to share their operational needs, challenges, and future plans.

City Administrator Hagen said he would look for another Councilmember to support these items being added to a future Work Session agenda. He added that some of these items could tie in with strategic planning which will be starting soon.

Mayor Heineman stated that anyone who has a list of items they would like to discuss at a Work Session should rank them in priority order of what they would like to discuss first.

Councilmember Olson added that he would also like to see a list of the items that other Councilmembers are interested in discussing.

City Administrator Hagen asked any Councilmember who has a list of items they would like to discuss to send the list to him and he can attach it to a Future Topics list at a future Work Session.

4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT

None.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian S. Hagen
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
City Clerk

Drafted by Ava Major
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.